

Regina Hosts Ecumenical Conference on Diaconate

By Canon Michael Jackson

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Close to 100 people gathered at Campion College, the Jesuit affiliated college at the University of Regina, for an international Anglican-Roman Catholic-Ukrainian Catholic conference on the diaconate. The conference, held May 10-13, was co-sponsored by the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Archdiocese of Regina. Believed to be the first of its kind, the conference attracted four bishops, eight priests, 55 deacons and a number of diaconal candidates and lay people, from seven Canadian provinces, six U.S. states, England, Scotland and New Zealand.

Bishop Rob Hardwick of Qu'Appelle and Archbishop Donald Bolen of Regina co-chaired the conference, while Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon was a session chair. Anglican bishop Donald Phillips of Rupert's Land also took part. The conference was an outcome of the covenant between the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and the Archdiocese of Regina, which has been in place since 2011. Said Archbishop Bolen, "This international conference is a new venture in our covenantal relationship, building on the fact that both our Churches have a threefold ministry including the diaconate, and that diaconal ministry is being explored in significant ways by both Churches, including our respective dioceses, at the present time."

Entitled "The Ministry of the Deacon: Word and Sacrament, Charity and Justice," the conference brought together 11 leading authorities on the diaconate from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. They addressed nine topics:

- the Conundrum of the Transitional Diaconate
- the Theological Basis of the Diaconate
- Women and the Diaconate
- the Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity
- the Diaconate in the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches
- the Prophetic Ministry of the Deacon
- the Deacon in the Worshipping Community
- Diaconal Formation
- Diaconal Relationships.

Roman Catholic speakers were Deacon Frederick Bauerschmidt, professor of theology at Loyola University in Baltimore, Sister Gloria Marie Jones of the Dominican Sisters of St. Jose in California, Deacon George Newman of Newman Theological College in Edmonton, and Dr. Brett Salkeld, archdiocesan theologian of the Archdiocese of Regina. Sub-Deacon Brian Butcher of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, was the speaker from the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

From the Anglican Communion, speakers were Deacon Phina Borgeson of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California; Canon Rosalind Brown of Durham Cathedral, Church of England; Deacon Susanne Watson Epting of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa; Deacon Canon Michael Jackson of Qu'Appelle, Deacon Maylanne Maybee,

formerly Principal of the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg; and Canon Alison Peden, director of ordinands for the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The presentations and discussions showed considerable convergence and common ground on the diaconate among the participants despite their different faith traditions. For example, there was a majority consensus that the “transitional” diaconate – the practice of ordaining people deacons for a brief period before they become priests – was unnecessary and undesirable. Deacon Susanne Watson Epting described efforts in the American Episcopal Church to come to grips with this conundrum. As Roman Catholic deacon George Newman said, “one would be led to wonder, if [a candidate for the priesthood] is not going to engage in traditional deacon ministry, why ordain him as a deacon?” Anglican deacon Maylanne Maybee noted, “if we were to be consistent, we would resume the practice of direct ordination (i.e. ordination to the priesthood without passing through the diaconate first).” However, countering this, Roman Catholic deacon Frederick Bauerschmidt and Anglican canon Rosalind Brown defended “sequential” ordination as deacon, then priest, on the grounds that all orders of ministry incorporate the diaconate.

Several speakers commented on the welcome recovery of the permanent or vocational diaconate, especially since the Second Vatican Council, as a distinctive order of ministry. It is no longer the “inferior office” referred to in the 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer, but a symbol and instrument of the New Testament idea of *diakonia*, or service, which is the vocation of every Christian through baptism. “Diaconal ministry,” said Canon Brown, “is a dynamic extension of Eucharistic celebration, as deacons are incarnational ministers of the Eucharist in the forgotten, awkward corners of the world.” The session on the prophetic ministry of the deacon explored in depth this role of incarnational minister. Deacon Phina Borgeson called on deacons to “exercise leadership in the church’s prophetic activity,... speaking out about injustices and inconsistencies” and protecting God’s created order. Sister Gloria Marie Jones emphasized that “the prophetic mission of Jesus, and therefore of the deacon, is about unity, inclusivity and forgiveness.”

The issue of women in the diaconate was of particular interest to the Roman Catholic participants: their Church does not admit women to ordained ministry, while the Anglican Communion ordained its first women deacons in the 1970s, soon to be followed by priests and more recently bishops. Sister Gloria spoke poignantly of her own experience as daughter of a deacon, whose wife actively supported him in his ministry. “It was truly a shared preparation and ministry....but one was ordained and the other was not.” She was present in Rome in 2016 at the meeting of women religious superiors where Pope Francis announced a commission to study the question of women deacons. “I have come to believe,” she said, “the ordination of women to the diaconate is important for the sake of the Church, much more than for the sake of women.”

Anglican and Roman Catholic speakers alike asserted the value of the deacon’s role in worship, despite a tendency in some areas of both Communion to downplay it. Deacon Bauerschmidt, who has published a book, *The Deacon’s Ministry of the Liturgy*, explained from the Roman Catholic perspective how the diaconal function in the Eucharist and other liturgies “points to the importance of the *diakonia* of the Church as a whole.” Canon Brown sees the deacon’s functions at the Eucharist – reading the Gospel, leading the intercessions, calling for the exchange of the Peace, setting the Table and clearing it, giving the Dismissal – as highly symbolic of the Church’s ministry of hospitality.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the conference, especially for the Anglicans, was the unique contribution of the Ukrainian Catholic participants. Brian Butcher gave a comprehensive overview of the diaconate in the Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic traditions, noting the presence of women deacons in the early church. Sub-Deacon Butcher, along with Bishop Bayda and Protodeacon David Kennedy of Toronto, led a moving choral celebration of Ukrainian Catholic vespers in Campion College Chapel. The conference participants also experienced Anglican compline and morning prayer and Roman Catholic morning prayer.

Highlights of the conference were the two eucharistic celebrations. While the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches are not in communion, Archbishop Bolen spoke of a real but incomplete unity. The bishops took part in each other's liturgies for the Feast of the Transfiguration. Bishop Hardwick preached at the Roman Catholic Mass at Campion College Chapel on May 12 concelebrated by Archbishop Bolen and Bishop Bayda. In turn, Archbishop Bolen preached at the Sung Eucharist at St. Paul's Cathedral on May 13, where Bishop Hardwick presided. All three bishops joined in giving the final blessing at both celebrations. And Bishop Bayda preached and gave the blessing at the May 13 joint prayer service of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle and Archdiocese of Regina – Solemn Evensong at St. Paul's Cathedral – the final event in the conference.

A month later, Archbishop Bolen ordained nine permanent deacons – who had all attended the conference with their spouses – at Holy Rosary Cathedral. This was the first group to graduate from the diaconal formation program of the Archdiocese of Regina, directed by Dr. Salkeld.

As Roman Catholic journalist Frank Flegel reported,

In spite of the vigorous debate, organizers said it was a learning experience. “We learned so much from each other, experienced each other's worship and theology and came closer together, which is really what the ecumenical movement is all about,” said conference secretary Deacon Michael Jackson, who has served 41 years in the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle. Joe Lang, a Roman Catholic deacon for 20 years, felt reaffirmed in his ministry after listening and taking part in the discussions, and said he found it interesting to hear about the variety of ministries in all the faith communities.

Conference organizers expressed appreciation to the Faith, Worship and Ministry Department of the Anglican Church of Canada and to the Archdiocese of Regina for grants which made the conference possible, to both sponsoring dioceses and the Regina Catholic School Board for providing resources, and to Campion College for hosting the event.

Canon Michael Jackson is deacon at St. Paul's Cathedral, Regina, and was secretary of the 2018 conference on the diaconate.



Three bishops involved in the ecumenical conference were photographed at Campion College. (l-r) Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon, Bishop Rob Hardwick of the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle, and Archbishop Donald Bolen of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina. (photo - Frank Flegel)



The final event of the ecumenical conference on the diaconate was a joint prayer service held at St. Paul's Cathedral on May 13. (from left) Deacon Michael Jackson, Protodeacon David Kennedy of Toronto, Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon, and Father Vladimir Simunovic. (photo - Margaret Ball)